



## **Fusion Center Coordinates New Jersey Hurricane Sandy Disaster Response**

Posted by Col Rick Fuentes, NJ State Police Superintendent on Tuesday, February 5, 2013

In late October, the Atlantic Coast faced its biggest hurricane on record. At one point, Hurricane Sandy covered one-fifth of the contiguous United States, its effects were felt from Florida to Maine, and its costs have been second only to Hurricane Katrina.

As analysts began to warn about the incredible size and potential harm of Hurricane Sandy, it was clear to both New Jersey government officials and citizens that information sharing and collaboration would be paramount to saving lives, protecting property, and dealing with the aftermath.

### **The NJ Regional Operations and Intelligence Center**

The New Jersey Regional Operations and Intelligence Center (ROIC) was uniquely prepared to help coordinate the response to Hurricane Sandy. One of 77 fusion centers created in response to the events of 9/11, the ROIC was established to receive, analyze, and share threat-related information with federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners.

Most importantly, the ROIC has always been a fusion center that combines both an intelligence center and an emergency operations center. By analyzing and sharing all crimes and all hazards information, the ROIC empowers frontline law enforcement, public safety, fire service, emergency response, public health, and private sector security personnel to fully understand and respond to both man-made and natural threats.

### **The ROIC Response to Hurricane Sandy**

Prior to and throughout the storm, the ROIC and New Jersey's State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) used ROIC's systems



and networks to issue detailed situation reports that provided up-to-the-minute information about the locations of shelters for those evacuating their communities, road closures, the status of various types of transportation, and the overall state of the disaster.

Additionally, the ROIC hosted Governor Chris Christie and his Cabinet officers, as well as 250 federal, state and local representatives occupying more than 100 computer workstations, command posts, and conference rooms. To date, more than 1,500 requests for logistical or personnel support have passed through the SEOC from agencies and municipalities addressing the debilitating consequences of the storm.

***Photo at right is Gov Christie meeting with the Office of Emergency Management, his cabinet, and senior staff at the ROIC in Ewing, NJ. Source: NJ State website***

### **Info Sharing, Coordination in the Recovery**

A mass evacuation often leads to looting and other significant challenges for maintaining public order. The ROIC's Intelligence and Analysis Unit (IAU), which usually produces homeland and hometown security intelligence assessments, shifted its attention to informing local and state police officials in New Jersey's most devastated shoreline communities about looting, contractor fraud, and other potential consumer rip-offs and schemes. The IAU scrutinized every storm-related arrest for patterns and trends, and in one case, identified a violent fugitive suspected in a storm-related string of copper thefts in the affected areas.

### **The ROIC Support in the Field**

The ROIC's work didn't end when Hurricane Sandy moved offshore. According to Major Christian Schulz, Commander of the ROIC, "The events that followed the devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy created a chaotic environment; the subsequent multidisciplinary approach to problem solving demonstrated how the NJ ROIC can adapt, meet the needs of its customers, and maintain its role as the information sharing point for homeland security."

Following the storm, the ROIC provided updated law enforcement-related information, maps, and other general public safety messaging—invaluable data used in the protection and rehabilitation of communities most severely impacted by the storm. Through the chiefs of police network, NJ ROIC personnel were deployed into the field and began the process of collecting information related to the condition of various municipal government buildings and infrastructure. The reports were developed to share with FEMA and

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to assist with prioritizing recovery efforts.

As I said in previous statements, it was abundantly clear that responding and recovering from Hurricane Sandy would require unfettered information sharing similar to a terrorist event or criminal crisis. From our fusion center lens, that stands at the core of our mission: information sharing.

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